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ABSTRACT

Physical education for special populations is a full-fledged sociological and educational movement. Issues concerning adapted physical education teachers involve improving the services of responsible educators, possible futures for adapted physical education,, and the true situation of physical education for the handicapped today. Issues which will have an impact on the life expectancy and quality of the movement include: (1) attitudes of physical educators toward adaptive physical education; (2) placement alternatives for handicapped students; (3) selecting teaching methods appropriate for individual students; (4) the mainstreaming of handicapped students into regular physical education programs; (5) parental involvement and support; (6) the realistic limits of the effectiveness of physical education for students with special handicapping conditions; (7) the certification process for adapted physical education teachers; (8) sport programs for special students; and (9) administrative support for physical education. (JD)

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# Physical Education for Special Populations:

# Beyond P.L. 94-142[1]

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[1]Keynote address at the Midwest District, AAHPERD, Adapted Physical Education Conference, Chicago, October, 1980.

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Physical Education for Special Population:

Beyond P.L. 94-142

## Introduction

When Carl Eichstaedt asked me if I would give the keynote address at this conference, I was very honored but equally skeptical. My personal perception of what a keynote speaker should be did not seem to coincide with Carl's request. For one thing keynote speakers are supposedly well-known in the profession. I obviously did not qualify on that criterion. Additionally, but probably related to the first, is the idea that people who give keynote addresses are usually older (at least older than I am). Given that I lacked both criteria but trusting in Carl's judgement, I accepted his invitation.

During my preparation for this address, I had cause to reflect on my professional experiences and realized that this month, that this occasion, is an anniversary of sorts for me. It was ten years ago this month that I started graduate school with the intention of specializing in the area of adapted physical education. In the ten years that have elapsed I have had many opportunities to meet and share ideas with individuals like yourselves. These meetings and the moments of sharing have meant much to me, and I know (I acknowledge) they have been a driving force in shaping my own philosophy.

## What is Physical Education for Special Populations?

What we do is called by many names. It depends upon with whom you speak and where you are located geographically in the country. It may be labeled: adapted, special, corrective, therapeutic, individual, remedial, and/or developmental.

I personally believe that it is not so much what we call it as what it means to each of us and to the many publics we serve. To me, what we do is more than just a name or a professional affiliation. It is more than a graduate course of study, more than a placement alternative, more than a curricular option or a modified instructional approach, and more than the adaptation of equipment and play environs. Rather, physical education for special populations is a full-fledged MOVEMENT! Yes, a movement with its own attitudes and ways of behaving.

Physical Education for special populations, it seems to me, is a legitimate sociological and educational movement. Our movement is not new. It had its roots in the late nineteenth century with individuals like Hitchcock and Sargent. It has been overshadowed at times, e.g., the athletic movement, the fitness booms, and most recently, the New Physical Education, but behind the scenes there have always been men and women, like yourselves, who have worked tirelessly to promote what, in my estimation, has to be the most humanitarian venture we as a profession perform. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I dedicate this keynote address to YOU!

Our Movement

A movement is "a series of organized activities working toward an objective." With this definition in mind, your presence at this conference confirms our status as a movement. Although our movement is viable unto itself, it is part of a much larger movement - the movement to gain for special populations their rights as members of society.

As individual members of a movement, we have certain beliefs or attitudes as well as we emit certain stereotypic behavior patterns. In the case of the former we believe in human dignity. We translate that belief into a second and equally important attitiude, that is, special populations have a right to experience movement and its concomitant benefits. An attitudinal profile of a member of our movement demonstrates a number of common virtues; namely, love, honesty, concern, patience, dedication, and empathy. Hopefully, we (the movement) will never lose these "feelings" or forget that beyond all the IEPs and curriculum assessment materials there is a basic emotional commitment which gives substance to all we do.

We likewise translate attitudes into observable behavior. We behave in ways that demonstrate a healthy commitment for the worth of the individual; the individual is central to our performance. We appear to be (and I think in most cases we are): organized, efficient, self-critical, creative, tireless, and business-like. I am genuinely impressed by the persons who call themselves members of our movement.

In the remainder of my time this afternoon, I would like to highlight some issues which, I personally feel, will have some impact on the life expectancy and quality of our movement. The format that I have chosen is one which will address each issue by asking the following questions:

1. What ought to be?
2. What can be?
3. What is?

With this in mind, I would like to discuss the following issues: attitude, placement alternatives, teaching, mainstreaming, parental support, special populations, certification, sport, and administrative support.

Attitude

What ought to be? Physical educators ought to respect the individual's worth and dignity. They ought to demonstrate an empathetic attitude and encourage special populations to do their best.

What can be? Physical educators can learn to accept individual differences. They can learn to accept students regardless of their disabilities and promote a healthy psychological learning environment.

What is? A large proportion of physical educators are not convinced that special populations belong in regular physical education classes. Perhaps we in higher education are guilty here. Most undergraduate students take one course in physical education for special populations; it singles out the handicapped. Perhaps it sends the wrong message.

Placement Alternatives

What ought to be? Flexible scheduling alternatives ought to be provided which would facilitate movement between and among classes or units as needed.

What can be? Realistically, physical educators in collaboration with their principals can develop alternative scheduling plans which can conceivably provide sufficient flexibility in the daily schedule to permit placement options.

What is? Currently, physical educators are still fighting the battle of overcrowded gyms, lack of staff, and increasing numbers of special students. Consequently, it is the handicapped student who is not receiving an appropriate physical education experience. Teachers are frustrated, children are being psychologically abused, and a movement, our movement, is being stopped dead in its tracks.

Teaching

What ought to be? Physical educators who are knowledgeable about movement, teaching, and human relations ought to provide appropriate movement experiences for those handicapped students most likely to be in regular public school.

What can be? Physical educators can learn to provide appropriate movement experiences for the majority of handicapped students in regular public school and with assistance from an adapted physical education consultant, provide appropriate experiences for that small percentage of students who require placement in other than the regular program.

What is? Teachers are presently inclined to work with high incidence populations provided their behavior is suitably controlled and they are not a disruption to the physical education class. However, low incidence populations who are increasingly more in evidence in regular public schools are being channeled into perfunctory activities at best. Some evidence exists to indicate that teachers are fearful of exacerbating the conditions of these students; consequently, emphasis (where it does exist) is placed on teaching higher functioning students.

Mainstreaming

What ought to be? Students ought to be assumed capable of performance in the regular physical education program with all the opportunities afforded such placement until such time as they are not able to learn, provided every conceivable effort has been made to individualize the education program.

What can be? Students who are most likely to benefit can be mainstreamed into the regular physical education program. This decision can (and in my professional judgment must) be based upon a total analysis of students' needs: social, emotional, cognitive, and physical.

What is? Because someone or some group arbitrarily decided that mainstreaming could occur best (and perhaps quickest) in art, music, and physical education, there is a prevalent mind set which attests to the placement of special populations (apparently regardless of need) in the regular physical education program. We (you and I) have permitted this phenomenon which is called "maindumping" to occur. This fiat, which is usually administratively oriented, has done more to erode the construct known as mainstreaming than any other single act I know.

Parental Support

What ought to be? Physical educators ought to involve parents, especially parents of handicapped students, in an advisory capacity. They ought to be our best advocates.

What can be? Physical educators can take steps to keep parents informed about programming. Public relations can be beneficial not only for that aspect of the physical education program for special populations but also the general program as well.

What is? Quite honestly what is, is a totally naive and uninformed public who on one hand is ignorant of our purposes and on the other is less than certain that physical education, as they perceive it, is of any benefit to students with special needs.

Special Populations

What ought to be? As a profession those of us in physical education for special populations ought to admit that there are some individuals for whom our programs are token at best. This ought to be interpreted as a sign of maturity rather than as a sign of professional incapability.

What can be? Physical educators can work with high incidence students and those low incidence students who seem to benefit from our programs.

In the case of the latter, we should work in concert with allied medical personnel when practicable.

What is? Some physical educators are trying to be all things to all people. Perhaps, as the comic character, Pogo, once stated, "We have met the enemy and he is us." We need to analyze our reason for being. Are we so enamored with our potential that we have failed to maintain a proper perspective? Are we doing such an outstanding job with the population with which we already work that we must seek more and more severely handicapped students upon which to demonstrate our abilities?

Certification

What ought to be? There ought to be a well-defined certification process for physical educators desiring to teach special populations. It ought to promote selectivity and be rigorously administered and enforced. It might better be thought of as licensure.

What can be? Institutions of Higher Education can be held accountable for the products (students) they produce. State Departments of Education can be held responsible for the teachers they certify.

What is? Teaching physical education for special populations is construed as a viable teaching alternative. Without a rigorous certification process, anyone could conceivably complete a set of courses and make a personal application to a State Department of Education for certification. This will doubtlessly delude the quality of physical educators teaching special populations just as our regular physical education teaching corps has been deluded over the years.

Sport vs. Physical Education

What ought to be? Sport ought to be an adjunct to a quality physical education instructional program. It ought to be an educational experience which maintains an appropriate relationship to physical education.

What can be? With strong administrative support and guidance, the sport programs for special population (e.g., Special Olympics) can be extensions of quality physical education programs. These programs can never be thought of as replacements for good movement programs.

What is? Sport for special populations is a reality, and it is increasing rapidly. In all too many instances, the competitive sports program is physical education. If not so labeled, then it becomes the goal of the physical education program during the weeks preceding a major event or competition.

Administrative Support

What ought to be? Administrators, especially building principals, ought to be supportive of our efforts to provide physical education for special populations. They ought to be willing to work with physical educators to provide flexible scheduling to accommodate students with special needs.

What can be? Principals and physical educators can work collaboratively to utilize available human and fiscal resources to provide better physical education for special populations. This can include the deletion of lunch or study hall duty from physical educators' schedules so they could conceivably teach an adapted class, if necessary.

What is? A great majority of principals treat physical education as a second class citizen. They rarely, if ever, enter the gymnasium; they schedule physical education last. They are not our best advocates. This makes the addition of special populations in our regular classes less palatable.

Conclusion

I have attempted to portray physical education for special populations as a "movement" with certain attitudes and ways of behaving and not as a mechanical, impersonal way of visualizing curricula with its infinite modifications. Additionally, I have attempted to address several issues, albeit they are not earth shaking - but they could spell the difference between mediocrity and excellence. I hope I have stimulated you to think about where we are going as a movement. To question why we do the things we do . . . .